Traditional and Critical theory – Any Relevance For Aspects of Eastern Cape (South Africa) History?

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Abstract

The growing relevance of Critical Theory *praxis* for analysing South African historical past and present, places additional burdens in present and past research outcomes in order to move away from the confines of traditional research outcomes and societal restructuring. It is generally accepted that the failed apartheid society is being replaced by another failing post-truth societal re-engineering process seemingly for the benefit of the masses by a *neo*-elite minority.

1. Introduction

Max Horkheimer's appointments in 1930 as professor of Social Philosophy and as Director of the Institut für Sozialforschung (Institute of Social Research) at the University of Frankfurt am Main profoundly changed the direction of research at the Institute, and specifically, the foundations of what would later become known as Critical Theory.

In this regard, Rodney Livingstone (2011: viii) wrote:

> ‘The general trajectory of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research is well known, as over time “critical theory” — originally Horkheimer’s code-word for Marxism — confined itself to the realms of philosophy, sociology and aesthetics; to all appearances completely detached from politics.’

Firstly, it was Horkheimer’s inaugural lecture delivered on 24 Jan 1931, entitled ‘The Present Situation of Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research’ that spelled out the fundamentals for future research programs for and at the Institute. Important as this lecture is, it does not form part of this paper. Secondly, in subsequent research, and in an attempt to systematically define Critical Theory (Rasmussen in Rasmussen 1996: 18), Horkheimer distinguished between what he termed *traditional* and *critical* theory. This lecture was originally published in 1937 under the title ‘Kritische Theorie’ in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*. For our purposes however, we used Horkheimer’s 1972 English translation by M J O’Connell, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays.*

Europe’s turbulent events between the inter-war years were at the roots of the historical and political experiences of the members of the Frankfurt School. After World War I, left-wing working-class movements of Western Europe were defeated, and in Germany, mass left-wing parties collapsed into Moscow-dominated reformist movements. The Russian Revolution degenerated into Stalinism, and likewise, the rise of Nazism and fascism were incongruent outcomes to orthodox Marxist ideals. These events were the background to ‘the problematic which sparked a critical theory of the modern form’ (Rasmussen in Rasmussen 1996: 17).

Under such bleak circumstances, new questions were asked about society and new answers expected. In other words, available models of explanation at the time were increasingly questioned, and new theories were subsequently developed. Influenced by the above, Horkheimer’s directorship brought far reaching changes to the Institute, and his views on *the differences between traditional and Critical Theory, are the focus in this paper.*

Implicitly, this means that an understanding of the anticipated differences refers to the usefulness of Critical Theory for alternative

research of South African history in an attempt to probe new research directions. In pursuit to arrive at alternative interpretations, South African historiography's break with the tradition of the liberal interpretation of the South African past, moved towards the emphasis on a class analysis of society. Revisionist historians made fruitful use of the influences of Althusserian structuralism (Marks and Atmore in Marks and Atmore 1980: 3); the interpretations of the *dependistas;* the *Annales* School, and social history (Marks and Rathbone in Marks and Rathbone 1982: 6), but interestingly (and unfortunately) appears not to have taken too much notice of the growing influence of German inspired Critical Theory.

German social thought of the early 20th century, is of importance for Eastern Cape (South Africa) historiography as well as in a much wider South African context. Eastern Cape history has a long tradition of German influence, e.g. German settlers of the mid 19th century; the role and influence of German missionaries in Eastern Cape history; Eastern Cape-German trade and industry links, and educational contact for more than two centuries. The influence of German speaking Europeans who came to the Eastern Cape during the 19th and 20th centuries, contributed positively to all levels of society in this region. There are ample examples in e.g. drama, literature and non-governmental organisations of their contributions.

Lastly, the ties with Germany, as were with Denmark and Nordic countries (Stolten 2011, 1), were strengthened during and after the 1970s regarding the solidarity and anti-apartheid movements, and the sanction policies and strategies. Today, together with South Africa, these (and many other) countries play important roles in African economic, political and military realities.

Currently, there are reasons in South Africa, based on the contemporary disillusionment with post-apartheid democracy, why this paper's focus is of relevance of the application of Critical Theory in South African historical studies. Widespread government corruption and lack of service delivery are just two supporting examples – not that there were no corruption and lack of service delivery pre-1994 – it is just that they are now appearing as novel research interests in literature. Both place strain on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and donor aid funds, as

pressing questions are now being asked about the sustainability, effectiveness and morality of such financial assistance. The nation-wide local election results of mid-May 2011, underscore *inter alia*, this view. On a continental scale, post-independent African historians examined the history and the contests of subaltern people 'as a critique of newly established nationalist interpretations of history in the new national states and also as a disillusion over the fruits of independence' (Stolten 1997: 3).

For the above (and other) reasons, an attempt will be made in a separate study to ascertain if aspects of this analysis are applicable to Eastern Cape historiography. This paper merely serves as the foundation for future study.

2. Contemporary definition of Critical Theory

The philosophical movements of 18th and 19th centuries in Germany, known as German idealism, originated from Immanuel Kant. Idealism is closely related to romanticism and revolutionary politics of the *Enlightenment* movement. The best-known philosophers of the idealist movement were Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Reinhold and Schleiermacher.

Across the Atlantic, German idealism was initially introduced to the broader American thinking through the work of a Vermont intellectual, James Marsh. Gradually, the value of idealism's theological concept of the infinite Absolute Ideal or *Geist* (Spirit), proved an alternative to the traditional Christian concept of 'Deity', and in so doing hoped to find comfort against the later influence of English positivism and empiricism. There is much scope to research this theme in the South African context.

From the outset in the mid-1920s, Critical Theory was hardly a strictly cohesive, well-defined theory. As a sociological method, it never meant the same to the diverse social philosophers associated with the Frankfurt School. At the core of Critical Theory's philosophical development, lies the break with German idealism and a tendency towards American pragmatism.

Critical Theorists draw inspiration from social sciences and humanities. Under the guidance of Horkheimer, it is therefore not surprising that from its founding years, the Frankfurt School promoted

interdisciplinary research activity. Critical Theory is essentially an examination and critique of capitalist society and culture but in a distinct manner. It refers to a style of Marxist theory that reflects a tendency to involve non-Marxist influences. The theoretical concern for a material 'superstructure' in Critical Theory is today practically the only central and original Marxist principle left in its contemporary language. The aims of Critical Theory can simplistically be summarized as a better understanding of present society, how it developed, and currently promotes the total transformation of society. These principles bring Critical Theory in contrast to traditional theory that historically focused only on the interpretation of society along empirical considerations.

Critical Theory deals *inter alia* with human alienation; is self-reflective in nature; normative, and therefore value driven. It seeks to extend an emancipated society that will be just, rational and more humane. Characteristically of such emancipated society, is a diversified educational system and humanity steered away from negative societal alternatives, e.g. Nazism and fascism. Critical Theory promotes a social balance between individual interests and enhances values that preserve universal solidarity where all forms of discrimination are eradicated. It seeks the rehabilitation of humans as social beings, liberated from all forms of enslaving alienations (Bottomore and Rubel 1976: 22). Accordingly, Horkheimer and Adorno (2002: xiv) wrote:

> 'What we had set out to do was nothing less than to explain why humanity, instead of entering a truly human state, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism.'

In a sense, the struggle for a just South African society was and is not dissimilar to the ideals of early Critical Theory. The fact that 'history writing is an important part of a nation state's collective memory and the nature of historiography is essentially selective and ideological' (Stolten 2004: 1), substantiates 'the need for a new synthesis' (Stolten 2004: 2).

3. What is theory for Horkheimer?

According to Horkeimer, most scientists up to Husserl, viewed theory as ‘the sum-total of propositions about a subject, the propositions being so linked with each other that a few are basic, and the rest derive from these’ (Horkheimer 1972: 188). However, should a theory not correspond to the asserted facts, then either the observer observed incorrectly, or there are problems with the propositions in question. When this happens one of the two needs to be corrected. For this reason, Horkheimer stated that ‘[i]n relation to facts, therefore, a theory always remains a hypothesis’ (Horkheimer 1972: 188) until it corroborates with the relevant facts (Engelbrecht 2019: 1–20). In his comparative study of the frontier and religion in America and South Africa, Boucher found it wise to ‘observe at first-hand’ the ‘similarities and differences of their development, in the light of their present-day condition’ (Boucher 1969: xi). Theory is not something up in the air, abstract, and without a base or form of connectivity, with society.

A further problem for Horkheimer is that excessive scientific specializations gave rise to research results that seem to be too limited. For him, deductions that were derived from others produced end-results that were too far removed from the original starting point to be meaningful.

Bohman described how Horkeimer viewed theory, *viz.* to be ‘explanatory, practical and normative, all at the same time’ (Bohman in Rasmussen 1996: 190). Firstly, this means that a Critical Theory must be able to explain what went, or is, wrong in society. Secondly, it must be practical in being able to identify actors to change such wrongs, and lastly, it must give clear norms for criticism of those wrongs and must spell out practical future goals for society.

From this, we can identify some characteristics that would encapsulate Critical Theory, in the manner that Horkheimer perceived it. Theory ‘is stored up knowledge, put in a form that makes it useful for the closest possible description of facts’ (Horkheimer 1972: 188). In our view this refers to the explanatory power of theory once having scrutinized the relevant facts. The practical value of theory needs to be beyond question (Horkheimer 1972: 191) and this characteristic refers to the empirical status of theory. Critical Theory is ‘a kind of scientific knowledge that

would have practical application in the circumstance' (Horkheimer 1972: 194). Furthermore, modern 'theoreticians of knowledge do not deny the importance of historical circumstance' (Horkheimer 1972: 195). This historical circumstance refers to humankind's attempts to adapt to reality in a way that best meets their needs through the continuous transformation and development of the material conditions of industrial (factory) – meaning, capitalist societies. Lastly, we need to remember that in its most fundamental origin, Critical Theory stems from the material relations between humankind – the production, selling and exploitation of various forms and stages of material creation by mankind, for mankind, in a manner that is incongruent with the principles of 'from each according to his ability, and from each according to his needs.'

But theory is not only theoretical or philosophical in nature. Whilst some might argue that philosophy has to do with laws of Being, or the cognition of God, and although they are not necessarily wrong, others, such as the logical empiricists, e.g. Carnap, will argue that philosophy mainly deals with scientific language. Philosophy does not function in a vacuum and the social foundations of every society change constantly, and also, as a result of the intervention of science, 'every pattern of thought is ideology since many ideas are mere illusions if viewed from the social base' (Horkheimer 1972: 254–262). For this reason, one needs to look deeper and '[t]he real social function of philosophy lies in its criticism what is prevalent' (Horkheimer 192: 264). But what is prevalent, is to be found in our immediate social conditions – they are, therefore, at the centre of philosophy (Horkheimer 1972: 268–269).

4. Traditional theory

Horkheimer's bone of contention with traditional theory stems from his critique of Descartes' hope 'to apply it [scientific method] to the difficulties of the other sciences, with not less success than to those of algebra' (Descartes 1989: 23).

For Horkheimer, traditional theory is being of the mathematical kind – *viz.* mainly a system of symbols. His view was that some social sciences followed this practice unsuccessfully. In an effort to arrive at a point where he could refute such methodology, Horkheimer distinguished

between two sets of social sciences: the first type is characteristic of Anglo-Saxon universities, which dealt primarily with the collection of factual detail that pertains to the research problems. They were empirical in nature and employed carefully formulated questions (as well as other means) to arrive at research results. Empiricists also dealt with exact formulations seemingly similar to mathematical procedures. They objected to theoretical formulations without personal experience. The empiricists thus, claim factual analysis and rigid methodological procedures. They regarded concern with general principles as apathetic and stressed the need for precise formulation rather than the formulation of mere comprehensive theoretical statements. Per definition, empiricists were not against theories but rather against theoreticians who had no 'personal experience of the problems of an experimental science' (Horkheimer 1972: 191). It was therefore questionable, for Horkheimer, if, under such circumstances, theory could be successfully applied to real societal problems.

The second or phenomenological sociologists were characteristic of German sociology. They dealt with abstract principles and the analysis of basic concepts. Their argument is that it is not enough to merely describe social phenomena, but that it is through comparison, that one arrives at the formulation of general concepts. In other words, phenomenologists maintained, that by using *other* methods than only data-collection, one could arrive at new research insights. They rejected convictions that social happenings can only be classified on empirical grounds. Whether the primary principles are arrived at through 'selection, by intuition, or by pure stipulation, make[s] no difference' because 'the scientist must certainly apply his more or less general propositions, as hypotheses, to ever new facts' (Horkheimer 1972: 192) as they become available. Once an essential law has been established and its hypothetical status asserted through the verification of facts in relation to the formulated conceptual knowledge, then a theoretical explanation has been established. Thus, empirical methodology and theoretical endeavour are not mutually exclusive.

Traditional theory dealt with this apparent inclusiveness between empirical method and understanding, in the following manner – be it from two different perspectives: Meyer said historical events happen

independently from the above relationship – that is, without causality; Max Weber, on the other hand, tried to find those determinant happenings that causally connect them to the historical event as a logical tool that can serve as a reconstructive historical explanation. But critical theorists criticized scientists of traditional theory for only setting immediate tasks that simply corresponds with their theory.

The essence of traditional theory can be summarized as follows: it is a kind of generalization based on human experience with a specific prejudice towards the natural sciences. Traditional theory distinguishes in Diltheyan sense, between *Geisteswissenschaffen* and *Naturwissenschaffen*. It imitates the latter in such a manner that the study of society must conform to the empirically established facts. In the final analysis, traditional theory's approaches are subject to a logico-mathematical bias that would not suffice for modern critical social theory of the Frankfurt School.

5. Foundations for the transition from traditional to Critical Theory

In order to control our natural world, including the economic and social circumstances thereof, a body of knowledge is required based on hypotheses. In industrialist society, capitalist theory (and associated knowledge) was absolutised to such extent that eventually it became nothing more than an ideological category. Horkheimer (1987: 19) wrote: 'The twentieth century is the age of unlimited possibilities.' And 'this society certainly has available the human and technical means to abolish the most blatant forms of physical wretchedness' (Horkheimer 2018: 28). But '[t]he capitalist system in its present phase is organized exploitation on a world-wide scale. Its preservation creates boundless suffering' (Horkheimer 1978: 28).

This characteristic of bourgeoisie society was the result of practical knowledge that pertained to particular circumstances that were deliberately employed to transform and develop the material foundations of capitalist society only for its own benefit. In this respect, a strong argument can be made out with reference to British colonial policy towards South Africa. Few would argue that the discovery of mineral wealth in the second part of the 19th century, were not contributing

factors to the extension of British colonial rule by incorporating South Africa into the Empire through various means – including war.

Secondly, newly discovered facts that are much needed for the establishment of new knowledge, are not only derived from purely logical or methodological sources but are rather understood in the context of the real social process (Horkheimer 1972: 194) – *viz.* the concrete historical circumstances. This was true even in the times of Copernicus, when logic alone could no longer suffice – instead, and already then, real-life situations influenced scientific structures. In modern times, however, accumulated knowledge is really applied society-wide across all industries and is a strong argument why interdisciplinary research is so much in vogue.

Two contemporary philosophical schools that evidently pay most consideration to the connections between theoretical work and social life-processes are the positivists and pragmatists. They view functional scientific results as a scientific task in itself, whilst, criticized Horkheimer, in actual fact, was nothing more than the personal opinion of the scholar. When the scholar and his science are imported into society, they do so in order to regard knowledge and results, as representing theory. This scientific specialization integrates facts into conceptual frameworks and experiments with the aim of establishing additional facts. For them, the dualism between thought and being, understanding and perception, is second nature. Their naturally false consciousness stems from scientific activity that is based on the division of labour – however, with no immediate or clear connection between them. Under such circumstances, the real social function of science does not manifest in society because of its isolated treatment of what theory means in human life. This alleged self-sufficiency of their scientific labour is unproductive, and only corresponds to the personal interests of the theoretical activity of the bourgeois learned.

Therefore, the transition from one mode of production to another is closely linked to social production that produces social relations. This transition does not happen in a vacuum. Neither is it a total break with the previous status. Transition is also not a particular, single moment of destruction of the old. In fact, transition itself has a structure of its own. This structure cannot simply disappear in thin air. It is characterized by

necessary labour and surplus labour. Necessary labour is the means of production, whilst surplus labour is the means of consumption (Balibar in Althusser and Balibar 2009: 306). The transition, therefore, brings about the production of 'things' as well as production of social relations.

For Althusser, Marx recognised two forms of transition: first, the transition from individual private ownership to means of production based on personal labour, and secondly, transition from capitalist ownership to individual ownership – such being based on acquisitions by the capitalists, and co-operation and common possession of all means of production, including labour (Balibar in Althusser and Balibar 2009: 308).

6. Critical theory

According to Critical Theory, the ideal is to strive for a 'unitary system of science' because present day self-knowledge is not synonymous with mathematical knowledge of nature. Instead, 'a critical theory of society is, a theory dominated at every turn by a concern for reasonable conditions of life' (Horkheimer 1972: 198–199). In other words, isolated sciences and the treatment of research efforts must understand and respect their own limitations. To achieve this, a new concept is needed to overcome the one-sidedness of their limited intellectual process. Such concept is Critical Theory.

The starting point for Critical Theory is the relation between fact and the conceptual ordering of facts as they are found in the material base of society. In the case of traditional theory, identical objects might in future provide problems to be resolved for one discipline, whilst for others they are accepted as fact and thus not experienced as problematic. In Critical Theory however, 'social sciences take human and nonhuman nature in its entirety as given and are concerned […] with how relationships are established between man and nature and between man and man' (Horkheimer 1972: 199). But in itself, this is not enough to bring the concept of theory to a new stage of development – '[w]hat is needed is a radical reconsideration, not of the scientist alone, but of the knowing individual as such' (Horkheimer 1972: 199).

These relationships between humankind and nature are concerned with the differences between the individual and society. The world is the

product of the human actions of society as a whole, and the objects therein, bear testimony of being worked on by mankind. The existence of current society is the historical product of past human oppression and conflict. In its negative form, social action always involves available knowledge and its application. Perceived facts, in and about society, are co-determined by human ideas and concepts – *viz.* mediation and action that results from deliberate work. Thus, the ordering of reality through an understanding and the passing of judgement on objects, involve the power of healthy human understanding or common sense. Our reason urges human collaboration to integrate facts into conceptual systems and the revision of facts through simplification or eradication of contradictions. We saw this in feudal society when scientific theory broke up the *status quo.* Modern development is reflected in conflicting national and international leadership elites who are in charge of the economy or the state. Incorrectly so, they are less concerned about the application of thought. Consequently, they exist in the realm of hypotheses and generate idle metaphysical ideologies that contribute little certainty for society.

Instead, according to Critical Theory, 'human activity which has society itself for its object', denotes critical human activity (Horkheimer 1972: 206). The aim of critical activity is not simply to eliminate some form of abuse but strives for the better functioning of structure that is critical for current and future society. Because it accepts the role played by the individual to improve such, it is distrustful of the separation between the individual and society. It accepts the planned decisions and rational determination of future goals. Critical Theory adopts a critical attitude towards nonhuman processess, such as war and oppression – both which stems from the world of capital. In this inhumane world, traditional theory separates value from research, and knowledge from action. The critical mind, however, works towards the emancipation and alteration of society and rejects as pure idealism, being the aforesaid practice of traditional theory. Having said this, Critical Theory is not opposed to research into ideologies or sociology of knowledge, and rather admits social conditioning of fact and theory.

In essence, critical attitude goes beyond the prevailing social ways of scientific activity and most certainly does not favour social disciplines (sciences) over natural sciences. Tensions that there might have been are

transcended, as are those that refer to the individual's purposefulness in relation to work-processess. Critical thinking rejects views that regard mankind's relationship to his work as part of human nature, as nonhuman and irrational. In this sense, critical thinking is the function neither of the individual nor the sum-total of individuals, but rather of the individual in his real relation/s to others and groups; in his conflict with a particular class and as the result of a network of relations with social totality, including his/her nature.

This real relation between social reality and nature exhibits experience that is analysed both in historical context and in terms of future human activity. Bourgeoisie society that leaves us with experiences of unemployment, economic crisis, militarization, terrorist regimes, and at present, a property system that is enough for individuals to only look out selfishly for themselves, is based on the intellectual weakness of traditional theory. Instead, what is required is the registering and classifying of facts with the help of the most suitable conceptual apparatus, to form a dynamic unity with the oppressed classes to work towards liberation. In this process, the theoretician

> 'exercises an aggressive critique not only against the conscious defenders of the status quo but also against distracting, conformist, or Utopian tendencies within his own household" (Horkheimer 1972: 216).

Horkheimer pointed out that traditional theory took the following for granted: its apparent positive role in a functioning society; a questionable relation to the satisfaction of general human needs, and the participation in renewal of life processess. Instead, Critical Theory presents alternatives relating to future society as a community of free individuals, where irrationality is eradicated and achieved through constant renewal of current conditions. Such achievements are free from external influences and are characterized by harmony between being and thought, understanding and sense perception, human needs and their satisfaction with a future 'relation between rational intention and its realization' (Horkheimer 1972: 217). This realization takes place through a world of concepts that make up the consciousness of mankind that is critical of the

present and does not preserve contemporary society but endeavours to transform it into the right kind of society. Here, theory urges the transformation of society as a whole, through the intensification of the practical struggle to which the theory is connected. This is not an abstract utopia, but rather the refining, revision and or abolishment of the theories that underlie the technologies of traditional thinking.

Towards such, the change agents for a future society, are the growing number of critical theorists: their influence on government and the relative power positions of parties with a positive disposition towards the ideals of Critical Theory – in essence, they are the intelligentsia (e.g. university professors, doctors, lawyers, middle-level civil servants, etc.). Their image of the future consists of 'one truth, and positive attributes of honesty, internal consistency, reasonableness, and striving for peace, freedom, and happiness' (Horkheimer 1972: 222). Their constructive thinking plays a more important role than only empirical verification. Their conflict with the views of the proletariat is not uncommon, because without such, there would have been no need for theory in the first place. They will lead society to a state of no injustice and derive their capacity for doing so from everyday actions – social, or scientific. The Critical Theorist reduces tension between his own thoughts and that of the oppressed humanity in whose service he thinks he affects history. This means that there is no Critical Theory of society that does not contain political motives. This truth must be reflected in personal thought and action that is concrete historical activity.

Horkheimer also set out the differences in the logical structure between traditional and Critical Theory. Traditional theory defined universal concepts under which all facts are to be classified and makes a clear distinction between them and primary propositions. For traditional, theory there is no difference due to time distances between unities in the system. Traditional theory identifies the causes or forces hidden in concrete facts. It ads new classes, and argue that changes are the result of previous knowledge that was deficient. Critical Theory, on the other hand, also starts with abstract concepts but is not satisfied to relate concepts of reality by way of hypothesis only. However, when dealing with the present situation, Critical Theory starts to analyse e.g. the economy based on exchange and deduces the present conditions from that

capitalist exchange economy – a system that dismantled feudal regulation, then the guild system and then that of the vassals. Critical Theory then analyses the conception of interaction of society and nature; the idea of a unified period of society; how it preserves itself; a concern for the future, and the primary interconnectedness between facts and nature. In its totality, Critical Theory is a single unfolding existential judgement of society in relation to the reality of recurring events in the self-same contemporary society.

Naturally, the understanding and application of concepts along the critical mode of thinking demand human activity and effort. This is achieved through paying greater attention to their logical implications. Understanding only, takes place in the unity of theory and practice. This means that they must relate with practical attitudes to the different social strata that they reflect upon. This reflection, in the critical tradition, rejects positivism as merely an alliance between metaphysics and different manifestations of oppression. For this to happen, bourgeoisie science must undo their contemporary dogmatic chains. Only then, and for the first time, therefore, will the transition from the present to a future society, ensure that mankind will be a conscious subject that actively determines its own way of life – away from mass-control. For this, to happen, there is a need for the conscious reconstruction of economic relationships; continuous theoretical effort; interest in a rationally organised future society; and not merely a theoretical emancipation but one that is *practised* as well.

To practice emancipation is to inevitably confront, or, being confronted with, the concept of social class. According to Critical Theory, in the liberalist period, economic predominance was a measure committed to the legal ownership of the means of production. This large class of private property owners exercised leadership in society who enhanced increased concentration and centralization of capital. Critical Theory judges the loss of the authoritarian state and the accompanying disappearance of ideology, as well as all its associated negative cultural factors. This does not make theory a mere collection of hypotheses. Instead, it forms a developing picture of society as a whole that captures this reality of an emancipated, class-free society.

Although it is possible to identify more similarities between traditional and Critical Theory, we will only make cryptic reference to the most obvious. Both theories agree that the general goal of theory is to establish universal systematic science (Horkheimer 1972: 188) with research interest into e.g. ideologies, or sociology of knowledge, or the usual activities that go on within classificatory science (Horkheimer 1972: 195). Both believe in the importance of historical circumstance (Horkheimer 1972: 209) and equal opportunities to developing a sense of knowledge (Horkheimer 1972: 220). Although this starts off (as is the case with other sciences) with abstract determinations, both seek the introduction of more specific elements to structure and concrete reality (Horkheimer 1972: 225) in their respective research undertakings. Scientific method requires, and seems to be in agreement, that deductions must be in correspondence to the relevant facts, and therefore the agreement that theoretical structure follows logical necessity (Horkheimer 1972: 226; Engelbrecht 2019: 1–20).

7. Conclusion

Horkheimer as a founding father of Critical Theory, is 'now viewed as the creator of a unique theoretical program that conceptualized an innovative process of interaction between philosophy and the social sciences' (McCole *et. al.* in Benhabib *et. al.* 1993: 11) – a relationship that is typical of 'an empirically supported social philosophy' (Schmidt in Benhabib *et. al.* 1993: 34). From its inception, Critical Theory leaned heavily on Marx's efforts to formulate a sociology of knowledge as a Critical Theory for a rigorous social science. To do away with speculative philosophy, would be to develop 'a critical social theory which would be of use to men overcome by misery' (Bottomore and Rubel 1976: 42).

The Frankfurt School's early Critical Theory shows few similarities, according to Horkheimer, with traditional theory. In any event, such were in principle only, as the differences between them overshadow any other characteristics. Horkheimer's arguments often reflect similarities with Feuerbach's Eleventh Theses, *viz.* – 'philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it' (Marx 1998: 571) – in

other words, theory of society ‘contain political motivations’ (Horkheimer 1972: 222).

Consequently, a modern definition of Critical Theory, as well as Horkheimer’s view of theory, substantiates his *praxis* of this tradition. Two concluding remarks remain: that the *task of Critical Theory* is to expose ‘non-human things’ and ‘the real social *function of philosophy* lies in its criticism of what is prevalent’ (Horkheimer 1972: 264).

Because Critical Theory stands in a specific relation to its object (Menke in Rasmussen 1996: 57), it strives to transform current society (Engelbrecht 2011: 1–10) ‘into a just, rational, humane, and reconciled’ (Jensen 1997) one in accordance with planned decisions and the rational determination of such societal goals (Horkheimer 1972: 207). These goals of Critical Theory fit well with the ideals of the ‘new’ society all South Africans struggled for, and still want to achieve. South African historiography testifies to such. Although a politically just constitutional system is in place, there are in reality still some historically inhumane conditions prevailing in our society – almost as if pure reason is not in place to ensure reconciliation and the desirable socio-economic betterment for all South Africans. However, to propose that ‘[the] conjunction of scholarly responsibility and political commitment stands central is South African historiography’ (Stolten 2002: 15) by generally regarding previous historiographical classifications as dated, and to rather be replaced by post-modernism (Stolten 2002: 1), is to miss the point.

The question then arises: to what extent is the above applicable to e.g. Eastern Cape historiography in order to reflect the ideals of modern Critical Theory, specifically given the fact that the Frankfurt School has often been criticized (Bottomore 1984: 9, 71-81) for not having paid enough attention to history. Both Critical Theory and radical interpretations of South African history make a case for history *as* critical social theory.

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